

## **BDS SE Branch 2023 Chairman's Report**

SE E Branch membership stood at 635 in December 2023, down from 644 at December 2022. A reduction, but a very modest one, the overall BDS picture being a modest change, albeit a small increase.

As usual we maintained communication with members through the HO email system, the BDS website and our SE E news in Deer magazine.

The Branch is in good shape financially as the Treasurer's figures show, although some costs, such as range hire, remain under review in view of increased cost vs low attendance. We moved bank accounts from Barclays to Virgin Money following HO's direction. This also assists use of a card payment machine at shows and events. It also meets HO filing needs for financial returns.

In 2023 our branch AGM on 4th February was held at BSRC ranges at Bisley following a Range day. The NRA protocol to shoot non lead ammunition remains in force at Bisley.

During 2023 we held three range days at BSRC Bisley, the first followed by the AGM, the Stalker's shoot and the Christmas shoot. Attendance remains modest but just sustainable. The future remains under review.

We also held a successful local trial butchery evening organized by Sean Woodger which was attended by 16 members local to the butcher. We will look at such events in future advertised at branch level although the issue is always, in the light of the preliminary organization involved, to guarantee attendance. Payment in advance is one method.

The seasons once again have been strange ones. Ruts seem to have been varied in the S E. The roe rut in July and August was evident but not as strong as usual in many areas and rather extended. The same was true of the Fallow rut in October. There were signs of rutting, scrapes and stands but in general activity in terms of calling, fighting or otherwise seemed variable locally during the usual period. However, the rut continued over an extended time. In late November there were still bucks reported as exhibiting rutting behaviour as happened in 2022.

Numbers of fallow in the SE remain high and crop damage continues to be reported as well as DVCs. The price of venison also remains generally low despite the promotion of wild venison as a quality and healthy food.

Ashdown Forest deer numbers remain high. However reported deer vehicle collisions during 2023 have reduced to 144 from 195 the previous year. Continued extensive culling thus remains as essential as ever. The number of walkers in the forest continues to be high, especially with dogs, making culling

difficult. Co-ordination of culling efforts across neighbouring landowners is required and a further updated census is needed, possibly coordinated by “High Weald”, and using thermal or aerial methods.

Richmond and the other Royal Parks once again had busy years and we retain our close relationship and links with them. We were invited to have our stand present at the Richmond Park open day in 2023 – the first since covid. This is always a nice occasion with various wildlife and other displays for the benefit of visiting public.

Dogs chasing deer continues to be an issue to be monitored in the parks, and the dogs on leads policy, during the birthing season in particular, has helped reduce the problem. The Park displays signs giving guidance to the public on how to behave with deer.

The rut in Richmond was, as elsewhere, not as noticeable or dramatic as usual, in part due to the continuing disturbance by the public, despite signs warning the public not to approach deer. Deer carcasses are occasionally found of deer killed whilst fighting in the rut.

We participate in the urban deer group “A Deer Strategy for London” which continues to monitor deer across London. Mapping deer in London is the priority. We await the next meeting.

In 2023 we attended the following five shows/events:-

Hampton Estate Open Day

Biddenden Tractorfest

Edenbridge and Oxted Agricultural Show, held on the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Richmond Park open day

SEAS Autumn Show and Horse Trials at Ardingly

The Branch would like to express its gratitude to Sean Woodger and our show team including Clive Hilton, Stuart Jeffery and Luke Saxby. Not only for their efforts on the show days, but also for all the work required to maintain our excellent stand - as well as getting it to and from the venues. Clive Hilton also qualified as a BSRC RCO for moving and static targets thus reinforcing our branch RO numbers.

We expect to attend all the usual shows during 2024. These are most important as BDS principle public face and our opportunity to interact with and educate the public on deer and deer topics, as well as meet current members and recruit new ones.

A number of EWAC meetings were held by Zoom during the year, proving useful in contact with HO and other branch chairs. I attended and/or provided input.

The SE E Branch members supported the Society internet auction once again by presenting lots and by bidding.

I gave a deer talk to the Friends of Bushy and Home Parks who kindly made a good donation to BDS.

I attended the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary London dinner.

I maintain my links with other relevant organizations including British Shooting Sports Council, NRA, and many others, to ensure good exchange of relevant information regarding conservation, shooting, and deer issues at both political and practical levels. I currently represent the Society on three independent advisory groups, Metropolitan Police, Hampshire and TVP.

Up to date email addresses are more important than ever for communication with members, in conjunction with HO. We have approximately 70%, which facilitates communication to SE E members with details and reminders of range days, events etc. This percentage has not increased greatly and is still much too low. We urge members, whose up to date email we lack, to please advise HO.

Running any organization with volunteers inevitably means that much of the work falls on few shoulders. A vote of thanks is due to our committee and especially our Treasurer, Secretary, Vice Chairman and all those who help run show stands, act as RCOs, train, lecture and do all the other aspects of the Society's work. Thanks go to all of those involved, and for their future support, as well as to the HO staff for their responsive and cheerful support.

DS 11.01.2024